

# Southeast News

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## Joyous Christmas!

*The staff of the Southeast Conference wishes you, your family and your congregation a renewing passage through Advent, a joyful Christmas and a happy new year.*

Unto you a Child,  
A Son is given.  
Praising, proclaiming  
The ingression of Love,  
Earth's darkness invents  
The blaze of Heaven,  
And frigid silence  
Meditates a song;  
For great joy has filled  
The narrow and the sad,  
While the emphasis  
Of the rough and big,  
The abiding crag  
And wandering wave,  
Is on forgiveness:  
Sing Glory to God  
And good-will to men,  
All, all, all of them.  
Run to Bethlehem.

He is the Way.  
Follow Him through the Land of Unlikeness;  
You will see rare beasts,  
and have unique adventures.

He is the Truth.  
Seek Him in the Kingdom of Anxiety;  
You will come to a great city  
that has expected your return for years.

He is the Life.  
Love Him in the World of the Flesh;  
And at your marriage  
all its occasions shall dance for joy.

— W. H. Auden  
from *For the Time Being*, 1934

## Where Southeast Churches Stand

*OCWM rankings released by UCBHM*

**THE GOOD NEWS** — three Southeast Conference churches ranked in the top 100 in per capita OCWM contributions for the entire United Church of Christ in 1996! Pleasant Hill Community Church in Tennessee even came in 15th in the nation, with an average contribution of \$193 per person. Close on their heels is First Congregational Christian Church in Montgomery. Ranked 22nd in the UCC, First Church is still working to recover from a tragic fire that destroyed their entire facility — yet their average contribution to OCWM was \$181 per person in 1996, a tribute to their commitment to the United Church of Christ.

**THE BAD NEWS** — as the third quarter of 1997 ended, average Southeast contributions to OCWM still had not reached 50% of the pledged amount. To date, the Alabama/Tennessee Association is leading received contributions at an average of 42% of total 1997 pledge (against the 75% anticipated by the end of the third quarter). Ala-Tenn is followed by Georgia/South Carolina at 40%, South Alabama/Northwest Florida at 29% and East Alabama/West Georgia at 26%.

The ministry and missions of the United Church of Christ depend on each individual church member's commitment to the ongoing financial support of our denomination and its work. And when your church fulfills its OCWM pledge and participates in other offerings throughout the year, the UCC and its conferences can continue to do the work of Jesus Christ in your community, in our region, across the country, and throughout the world.

T H E  T O P  T E N	CONGREGATION	OCWM RANK	OCWM PER CAPITA	MEMBERSHIP RANKING
	Pleasant Hill Community (TN)	15	\$193	2815
	First Congreg. Chr., Montgomery	22	\$181	4886
	First United, Belvidere (TN)	81	\$126	3574
	Pilgrim Congreg., Chattanooga	206	\$94	2730
	United Christian, Crossville (TN)	250	\$87	4357
	Elder United, Dadeville (AL)	405	\$73	5974
	Central Congregational, Atlanta	447	\$70	407
	Pilgrim Congreg., Birmingham	554	\$65	3574
	Community, Fairfield Glade (TN)	684	\$60	2536
	Pilgrimage, Marietta (GA)	800	\$57	2205
<i>All rankings are national for 1996. Dollar amounts reflect per capita giving.</i>				

To review the reports of contributions made by Southeast Conference churches, contact the Conference Office at 800/807 1993. Rankings are available as follows: Per Capita Basic Support, Local Mission by Membership, and Total OCWM by Membership. Other nationally compiled data is also available.

Welcome to the new look of *Southeast News* — the quarterly publication of the Southeast Conference. We hope the *News* provides you with the information you need and want, and we invite your input for future editions. If you have comments or suggestions, just call editor Cheri Lovell at the Conference office: 800/807 1993.

## A Letter from the Conference Minister



This fall we have entered a whirlwind of meetings in the Southeast Conference: annual meetings of Associations, committee meetings, planning meetings, meetings for search committees, church councils, lay leaders and clergy clusters.

In the midst of this business, it could be easy to lose the sense of entering a season of eager anticipation in our life as a Conference.

So much of the planning that we have done in our first year together as Conference and Conference Minister is beginning now to be implemented. As the new members of the Conference Staff begin their work, there is for me a certain excitement bubbling to the surface, and a joy at the possibilities that are beginning to emerge which have lain dormant just beneath the surface. I am aware, too, of the ways in which many of us strain and pull at the bonds of covenant that hold us together as Conference, Associations, congregations. Somehow, the quiet voice of God which calls us, in the words of Christ, "to be one," is faintly heard above the cacophony and clamor of the ways we live with and speak to each other.

I am more deeply convicted in this time that at the very core of the Gospel, as we seek to discern and embody its promises, lies the call to reconciliation. That call to reconciliation spans theologies, and races, and genders, and so many other ways in which we are different, one from another. Yet all of us long for peace. Deep in our souls we long for peace within ourselves, with others, and within our beloved UCC.

When I spoke to the gathered delegates at the Annual Meeting of the Southeast Conference in Suwanee, Tennessee, over a year ago, shortly after being elected Conference Minister, I quoted to you a lullaby with which Carol and I used to rock our children to sleep: "All God's children got a place in the choir. Some sing low and some sing higher. Some sing aloud on the telephone wire, some just clap their hands or paws or anything they've got now." As I work among you, dream with you, pray with you, I will say to you in every way I can, "All God's children got a place in the choir..." We are called to live in intimate ways within our congregations and with our life in the Conference and Association. God's call is to be a people of love, of peace, and of justice. As we seek to live out this call, it is sometimes messy, sometimes painful; but more often, it is deeply rewarding.

As we have come to know each other in the Southeast Conference, and make this journey of faith together, I remind you that we belong to one another. We are bound together as inescapably as a mother and father are to a child. We are in a sacred covenant of mutuality that cannot be easily or lightly broken. I thank you for being with me on this sacred journey.

Peace,  
Tim Downs

## SEC Organizes Crisis Response Teams

Over the last several years, working in consultation with the UCC Office of Church Life and Leadership and the SEC Commission on Church and Ministry, **Holly Nelson** has led the Southeast effort to develop a system through which the Conference can respond quickly to churches in crises related to clergy sexual misconduct and other highly conflictive situations.

The Conference is inviting all members of association Church and Ministry Committees, as well as others who have an interest in these issues, to attend a training for Crisis Response teams, to be held from noon on Saturday, January 17 through 9:30am on Monday, January 19, at Simpsonwood Retreat Center in Norcross, Georgia. This regional workshop — which will also involve the Southern, South Central and Florida Conferences — will train participants in how to respond to allegations of clergy sexual misconduct and other relational crises within the life of the congregation.

Keep your eyes open for further word, as we continue to seek to be present to our congregations in new, creative and faithful ways.

## SEC Ranks First for Hunger Action Fund

When the 1996 results for the Hunger Action Fund were announced, the Southeast Conference *topped the nation* in per capita contributions to the Hunger Action Fund! In addition, the Southeast ranked in the top five for largest dollar income increase, and in the top one-third of total conference contributions with \$4,138.

## Bernice Powell Jackson Keynotes

"We live in the best of times and the worst of times," Bernice Powell Jackson said to those gathered for the Ala-Tenn annual meeting. In her keynote address, the Executive Director of the Commission on Racial Justice of the UCC focused on the state of racism in the United States.



There has been too much violence through the years around racial matters, she said. Where at one time African-American churches in the South were bombed, today they are burned.

"When we don't talk about race, we create a deadly silence. It is time we

begin to move beyond the racism that has been so characteristic of this century because as we enter the next, there will be no clear majority racially. As we look at an increasingly diverse population in the United States, we need to recognize that many racial issues are issues of economic justice. There has been a 400% increase in African Americans entering the middle class economically, and yet there still remain hundreds of thousands mired in poverty and despair.

Too often on racial matters, she said, we scare ourselves so badly we end up hurting ourselves. It is time for us to destroy the racial barriers that have separated us, and to begin addressing the economic barriers that separate us. We need to move beyond black and white to address materialism and rampant greed — issues that separate us as surely as burning churches and inequitably funded schools.

Remembering the words of Valerie Russell, Dr. Powell Jackson said that too often we speak about race in only shouts or whispers. We need to find intelligent ways to interact about this important matter.



## SEC Women Join Regional Retreat

UCC women from around the South gathered in late September in Blowing Rock, North Carolina for two days of learning, prayer and community under the theme, *Strangers No More* (Eph 2:19-22). Rev. Diane Snowa of the Eastern Virginia Association of the Southern Conference, delivered the keynote address.

Two of the retreat's eleven workshops were conducted by Southeast women: **Reverend Sandye Mullins** led "What Name Does God Know You By" and **Sharon Neely** led "The Power of Prayer."

Other workshop topics included highlights from the Hunger Action effort, crafts, "Recording Our Faith Journey" (on journaling), Caring for the Caregiver, and "We Came and They Sustained Us" — an introduction



to Native American people and concerns.

On Saturday afternoon, participants were invited to enjoy the North Carolina Mountains on several area tours: to see the religious frescoes in Glendale Springs, to visit The Mast General Store (est. 1833) in Valle Crucis, to tour the Cone Estate on the Blue Ridge Parkway, and to climb Grandfather Mountain.

**Frances Smith** of the Southeast Conference helped to plan the 1997 edition of this popular biennial meeting, and **Trudy Braun**, chair of the SEC Women's Commission, conducted a gathering of Southeast women Sunday morning. The next women's retreat will be held in 1999 in New Orleans or Texas, sponsored by the South Central Conference.

— Virginia McCamey

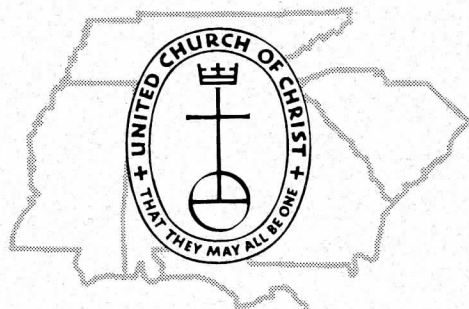
## In Memory: Rev. Hugh Lasseter

On October 11, the Southeast Conference bade farewell to the Reverend R. Hugh Lasseter, in a funeral service led by **Rev. Floyd Carmack** and **Rev. Charles Cook**, presbyter of the Northeast Georgia Presbytery. Hugh held dual standing in the UCC and the Presbyterian Church. He was ordained in 1952 in the Antioch Church in Andalusia, Alabama by the South Alabama/Northwest Florida Association.

During his long ministry of 45 years, Hugh served congregations in

five southeastern states of Appalachia, and it was Hugh's initiative and research that led to the establishment of Bonanza Church, later renamed Trinity, in Jonesboro (now Hampton), GA. Hugh is survived by his wife **Eloise Pritchett Lasseter** of Hiwassee and Hampton, Georgia.

— Rev. Edward Brown



## Rev. Dick Sales Named Third Conference Associate



The first weekend in October marked an important turning point in the ministries of the Southeast Conference. On Sunday, October 5, Rev. Richard W. Sales retired from his pulpit at Pilgrim Congregational Church in Birmingham after nearly ten years. The next morning, he officially joined the

staff of the Southeast Conference as Conference Associate for Mission Development and UCC Identity.

Of course, Dick is no stranger to the Conference — he has served in a variety of capacities, including Stewardship Chair, Vice Moderator, and most recently, Moderator of the Conference. In his new post, one of three one-third Conference Associate positions, Dick will promote the UCC identity across the Southeast, help Conference congregations remain connected with the greater mission of the UCC, and work to create ecumenical mission partnerships locally, nationally, and globally. Dick's experience on the mission field makes him an ideal choice for a job that has as its focus the development and interpretation of mission across the Southeast.

Dick began his ministry at First Congregational Church in Middletown, Connecticut in 1956, after receiving his first of three degrees from Chicago Theological Seminary. The next year, however, he left the United States for an extended career on the mission field in Africa under the auspices of the UCBWM, serving in South Africa, Botswana and Zambia.

During his years abroad, Dick returned to Chicago twice to complete first a Masters degree, then a Doctor of Theology. He returned "for good" in 1986, and accepted a call to the pastorate at Pilgrim in 1988.

In the summer of 1998, Dick will be joined in his role by Rev. Bennie R. Liggins, a Chaplain and Lt. Colonel in the U.S. Air Force. Bennie began his career in ministry in 1986, when he graduated from Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta and received a chaplain's commission. Bennie has served across the U.S. and in Italy, returning to Atlanta in 1994 for post-graduate studies at Emory.

Over the coming year, Bennie will consult informally with Dick. Next year, he and Dick will share the one-third position, working together to shape Mission Development in the Southeast. In two years, Bennie will assume Dick's present responsibilities in full, and Dick will retire from the Conference staff. Bennie's experience in the armed forces, working among women and men representing a range of ages and backgrounds, will help the Conference identify ways to reach out in new directions.

For the time being, however, Dick's will be the face you see in churches and at Conference events. When he's not out on the road, he can be found in his office at Greater Birmingham Ministries. To reach him with questions or a welcome, leave a voice message on Dick's Conference phone: 800/807 1993.



# Southeast

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On October 18, United Congregational Christian Church of LaGrange hosted the EAL/WGA annual meeting, and invited Rev. Dick Sales to offer the keynote address — he highlighted the need for covenantal relationships. **Rev. Arthur Dailey** was elected Moderator to succeed **Jimmy Pilkington**. **Louise Cox** was elected Vice Moderator, while **Betty Moon** and **Don Harmon** will continue as Secretary and Treasurer, respectively.

Several noteworthy actions were taken at the meeting:

- The cookbook developed by the women of the Association was dedicated to the work and witness of Ms. **Lala Allen**.
- **Louise Cox** described a mission she joined through SIFAT in Ecuador, noting the provision of guinea pigs for breeding to feed poor families.
- **Bill Tweed** asked churches to prepare gifts for Elon Homes children.
- **Roy Bain** reported on the Allen Retreat Center pavilion progress.

And, the women of United Church of LaGrange served an excellent lunch.

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The first weekend in September, ALA/TN met at First Congregational Church in Birmingham around the theme, *The Church Alive: Leading God's People to Community*. Dr. Bernice Powell Jackson, Executive Director of the Commission for Racial Justice of the UCC, offered the keynote address.

Elections included **Dr. William M. Chew** as Moderator, **Rev. Milton Hurst** as Vice Moderator, **Rev. George E. Blair III** as Secretary, and **Rev. Edward Schneider** as Treasurer. The Association recognized churches for their faithful support of its work, and Tim Downs thanked ALA-TN for its continued support of the Conference and OCWM. In addition, Tim introduced Dick Sales and Rev. Bernie Liggins, the new Conference Associate(s).

A resolution was presented entitled "Alert to Dismantling of Affirmative Action," which urged the Association to "marshal its efforts to combat the demise of affirmative action."

The highlight of the meeting was a tour of the Civil Rights Institute coordinated by **Odessa Woolfolk**.



# Round-up

The first weekend in October, SAL/NWFL met at Antioch Congregational Church in Andalusia, Alabama, with a theme taken from Ephesians: *Endeavoring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace*. Elections included **Woody Clark** as Moderator, **Robert Foreman** as Vice Moderator, and **Wanda Clark** as Secretary/Treasurer. **Marvin Brand** was thanked for his considerable contributions as Moderator.

Recognition was extended to **Rev. Joe Brown** by a number of people, most notably by **Bruce Clark**, who praised Joe for his faithfulness and his many contributions to the Association.

Tim Downs and Dick Sales both presented reports on the work of the Conference, and thanked the Association for its active participation in the life and support of the Southeast Conference of the United Church of Christ.

The attendance banner was given to Antioch, and the women of the church provided lunch after an installation and communion service led by Tim Downs.

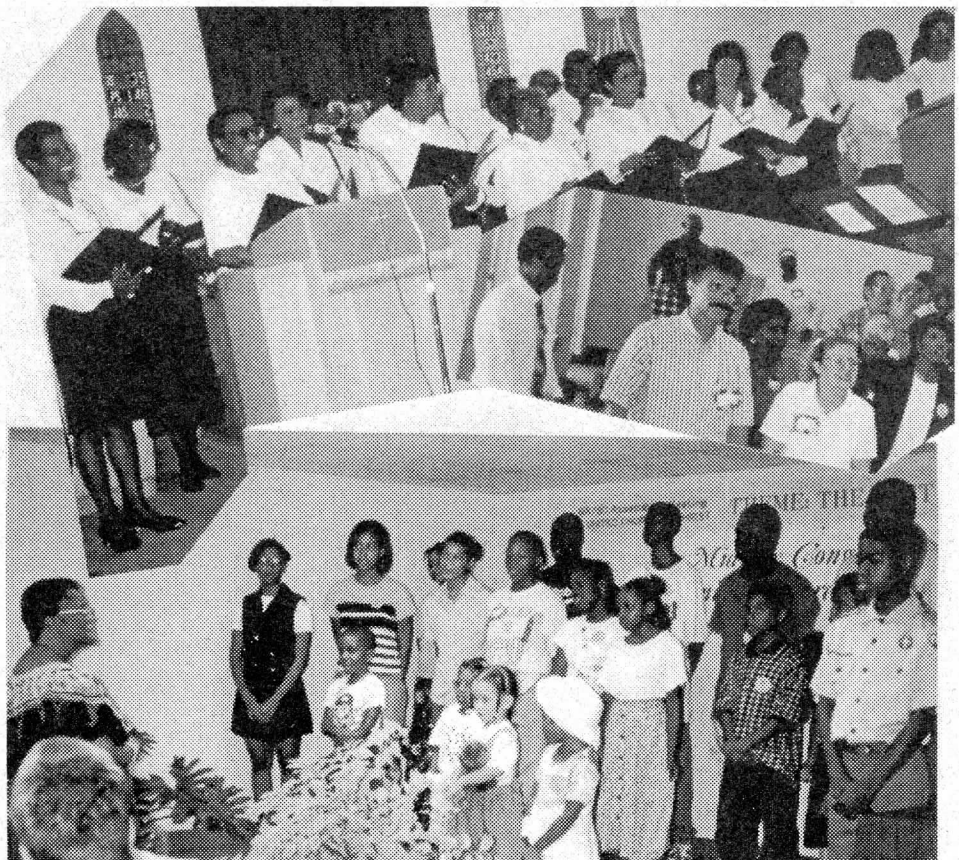


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The second weekend in September, the GA/SC Association met in Midway, GA at Midway Congregational Church — an historic UCC site 25 miles south of Savannah. The association's theme, *The Best is Yet to Come*, was highlighted by keynote speaker and Conference Associate Dick Sales.

The Association's business included election of a new slate of officers and committee chairs, including **Rev. Dr. Artis Johnson** as Moderator, **Rev. Annette Nielsen** as Vice Moderator, **Lisa Alston** as Secretary, and **Bette Graves Thomas** as Treasurer.

The gathered group enjoyed the warm hospitality and good cooking of the women at Midway. The annual Friday evening session was made more memorable by a performance of the Liberty County Chorale — a group of singers, many of whom have been singing together for decades. On Saturday, youth from across the Association — ages 4 to 16 — took the stage with a song they had worked to prepare.



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# The Southeast in Mission

## News from the Marshall Islands...



*Karl and Jan Whiteman send greetings to the Southeast Conference from their mission outpost in the South Pacific.*

For Jan, another school year began in late August. She is teaching 8th grade at Rita Christian Elementary School (RECS). At the suggestion of the principal, along with their regular studies, Jan's 15 students have decided to raise funds for an educational class trip to the U.S. with a variety of fund-raising events — but the students know their grades and studies must remain a priority in order to be eligible for the trip.

Early last May, we both attended the week-long MC-UCC (Micronesian Council of the UCC) meeting in Pohnpei with about 80 other people. After the meeting, we traveled to Taiwan with Dr. Ching-fen Hsiao, Area Executive of the East Asia and Pacific Office (CGM/UCBWM), and our Marshallese Partners, Rev. Jude and Dinah Samson. We were hosted in Taiwan by the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan (our partner in Mission) during an informative and enjoyable visit that included visits to several PCT mission sites. Karl preached in Pingtung on Pentecost Sunday. Although Christians represent only 4-5% of the population in Taiwan (as opposed to 90+% in Micronesia), we all discovered that their witness is vibrant and widespread.

In June, Karl taught and led activities for a group of 1,200 youth who gathered from throughout the Marshall Islands for a Youth Conference. July brought the two-week General Conference of the *Jarin Rarik Dron* (the UCC in the Marshall Islands), which resulted in the development of a formal "sister church" relationship between the JRD and the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan. Three new pastors were ordained the final Sunday of the conference, which was attended by over 1,500 people. In August, we finally took some time to vacation in Bali.

We are grateful for your continued contributions to "Basic Mission Support" and to OCWM, that support our work here in the Marshall Islands. If you would like to contribute in additional ways, please contact us about sending Bibles — or check the "needs list" that is maintained by the CGM East Asia & Pacific Office of the UCBWM/DOM in New York.

We also thank you for your prayers and letters. Please continue to pray for our health and strength (especially for Karl, who developed bronchial asthma last April), for the people and students we serve, and for the Holy Spirit to be alive and vibrant in the life of the churches both here and at home.

**Write to us at our new e-mail address:**  
**kwjwucc@ntamar.com**

## Back Bay

"They bring loads of shrimp from the gulf and it is so delicious!" I have heard those words uttered from the mouths of many UCC members across the years, but never had the opportunity to partake in this testimony until this month at the 75th Anniversary of the Back Bay Mission in Biloxi, Mississippi. Members of First Congregational Church (Birmingham), now known as the "Back Bay Bunch," joined me in celebrating this important ministry of our denomination and service to the people of Biloxi, Gulf area.

The celebration for the registrants began with a worship service at the Methodist Seashore Assembly Grounds. Choir members were from the New Orleans Association and Bennie E. Whiten, Jr., Conference Minister of the Massachusetts Conference was the preacher. Later in the afternoon, a keynote address was given by Tom Dipko, Executive Vice President of the United Church Board for Homeland Ministries with a response panel reflecting on the theme, "The Church and 21st Century Mission."

We later rode to the new Back Bay facility and toured the offices, the thrift shop and rooming areas for work campers. We were very impressed with the space and the thrift shop — with a book by bell hooks for \$.10! (Because the gaming industry has grown dramatically in the Biloxi area, Bay Back Mission was required to move to a new facility further from the poor population it serves.)

We concluded our day with the shrimp boil, accompanied by music and fellowship. Our church looks forward to supporting the mission in the future through the involvement of our youth and others. The ministry of the Back Bay Mission welcomes visitors and support from all the UCC family — you might even get a chance to sample those tasty shrimp!

— Rev. Rodney Franklin  
First Congregational Church, Birmingham



## OCWM in the SEC

For seven years, the Southeast Conference, in mission partnership with the Iowa Conference, has organized work crews of twelve to eighteen people each year to bring the healing and caring presence of Christians to people in need. Over the years, crews have rehabilitated homes in poverty-stricken corners of Appalachia, repaired a church camp and made it accessible to people with disabilities, repaired homes following floods in Georgia and the Midwest, sent work crews to rebuild burned churches in the Southeast and Southern Conference, and much more.

This year, the mission partnership work crews built "A Roof for Rosie" in Tunica, Mississippi. They gathered for a celebration and dedication of Rosie's new home on September 24, joined by Rev. Sue Ingram, the Iowa Conference Minister, and Rev. Dick Sales, Southeast Conference Associate.

**Elizabeth Clement** and **Charlie Lord** co-chair the Mission Partnership Committee, which includes **Ben Welch** and **Trudy Braun** from the Southeast Conference. Thanks to their dedication, and to all who give to OCWM through local congregations, the Southeast Conference has brought comfort to the afflicted, hope to the despairing, and shelter to the homeless.



# News from around the UCC

## Reflecting on General Synod

When I reflect on the wonderful experience of representing the Southeast Conference at General Synod, many memories come to mind — but two special ones will, I hope, stay with me and perhaps even change me.

Toward the end of Synod, when I was feeling the effects of too little sleep and too many plenary sessions, representatives of the Council of American Indian Ministries filed onto the stage carrying colorful quilts, baskets, drums. Frankly, I was at the point of thinking, “Can we just get on with what we *have* to do and skip the frills?” Their spokesperson then began to explain how Native Americans traditionally measure wealth — not by what one *has*, but by what one *gives away*. They will compete in giving, not in acquiring. One representative from each Conference was then asked to come forward to receive as a gift one of those hand-made objects as a gift. Although I don’t remember what they gave the Southeast Conference, I will never forget that display of generosity and their way of understanding wealth.

My second set of special memories has to do with the resolution calling for “integrity and fidelity in all covenanted relationships.” The original proposal involved only clergy, calling for “fidelity within the covenant of marriage or chastity in singleness.” Although I was not assigned to the committee that was to consider this resolution, I went to observe that meeting when my committee adjourned early. Entering a room where I expected to find controversy, instead I found a room full of people working together to draft a resolution that would be acceptable to the wide range of opinions represented. They had apparently decided early on that the same standards should apply to *all* members of the UCC and to *all* covenanted relationships. When I got there, they were refining the language. I have never seen a large group of people work successfully on such a task, but this group of people was committed to hearing all opinions and to listening to the guidance of the Spirit. It was indeed holy ground in that committee room!

When the committee’s resolution was presented to the plenary session, it set the standard of “integrity and fidelity in all covenanted relationships” for *all* members of the UCC. While there was some floor debate, the tone remained respectful, and delegates seemed to sense the “fidelity and integrity” with which the committee had done its work. The committee’s resolution was adopted by a large majority of the Synod delegates.

During the vote on this resolution, I noticed that a delegate whom I had come to respect voted in opposition to the resolution, which surprised me. I asked her later about her opposition, and she told me that she did not think that she could in good conscience vote for something that she herself could not fulfill. She went on to say that she had worked in retail appliance sales for many years, and prided herself in the relationships she had formed with customers. Recently, the owners of her store have required that each customer be urged to purchase a maintenance contract that was very lucrative for the company but was often a waste of her customers’ money; she complied with the directive to secure her job. In her view, she was not acting with “fidelity and integrity” in her relationships with her customers and could not set a standard for other members of the UCC that she could not meet herself. While I could have argued about the way she interpreted a vote for the resolution, I was profoundly moved by *her* integrity and fidelity.

As I reflected later on the entirety of General Synod, I realized that the whole experience reflected those values of “integrity and fidelity.” There was great respect for differences and continued striving toward consensus guided by the Spirit. In plenary session, we were reminded not to have any emotional show of celebration following votes, since that would show a lack of respect for those whose position did not prevail. I had never encountered a setting with such a rule, and I hope that this memory will stay with me and guide me in future settings. I am profoundly grateful for the privilege of representing our Conference.

— Dorothy Gager

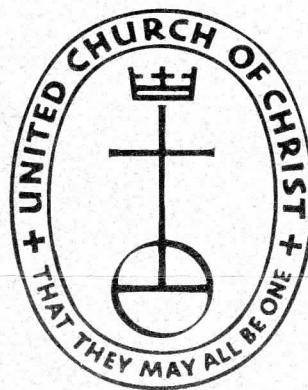
## National Highlights

### Action taken at the 1997 General Synod —

- approval of a restructured governance system for the UCC, consolidating nine national offices into four larger ministry units
- re-election of Rev. Paul H. Sherry as President
- reaffirmation of the role of pastor as teacher
- rejection of a resolution urging congregations to place a portrait of Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. in their churches, to avoid the substitution of symbolism for real action against racism
- condemnation of the 1996 Federal Welfare Reform Act as unconscionable, and called on churches to learn how the new welfare system will challenge their ministries
- call for Congress to close the infamous “School of the Americas” at Ft. Benning, GA, some of whose graduates are believed to have been involved in massive human rights violations in their home countries
- support for a global ban on land mines
- call for an end to female genital mutilation prevalent in Africa and Asia, and practiced by immigrants in the U.S. from those regions

### In other news —

- In the last quarter, the UCBWM has worked in relief efforts around the world, including Bosnia Relief, Landmine Relief, the North Korea Food Crisis, Shoes for Ukraine, and Zaire Refugee Crisis. U.S. disaster efforts have included storm relief around the country.
- The UCBWM’s American Missionary Association is organizing a network of lawyers to advise conferences and local churches on issues of justice — such as helping a local church that is struggling to interpret the welfare reform bill recently passed by Congress. Interested attorneys should call Rev. Allison Phillips at 216/736 3260.
- According to a national study by the Rev. Jane Heckles, Associate Conference Minister for the Southern California Conference, churches who become “Open and Affirming” — affirming gay and lesbian members into the full life of the church — not only increase membership by an average of 19%, they increase giving by 12%! Heckles believes the intense study and dialogue members go through before voting energizes them into a new and more faithful relationship to God.
- Nearly 30 years ago, the UCC Office of Communication was instrumental in the successful push to establish Equal Employment Opportunity rules for government agencies. Recently, the Office became lead petitioner in a “friend of the court” brief to the U.S. Supreme Court in a case involving two New Jersey teachers vying for the same job.



# From the Conference Associates

In our prayers...

*In this column, which will appear regularly in Southeast News, you will find a listing of churches in the Conference for whom your prayers, week by week, are sought. Over the year, we will cover all the churches and Associations in our prayers. Please send any information or prayer concerns for your own congregation — joys as well as needs — to the Conference Office for "In Our Prayers."*

## JANUARY

- Jan 4 For our Conference Board of Directors, meeting next week, led by Dr. Annie Neal.
- Jan 11 Pyron Chapel in Bonifay, FL as they seek to resolve manse issues.
- Jan 18 Montgomery's Comm. Congreg. UCC gives thanks for a first year of growth & new vision.
- Jan 25 Pilgrim Congregational Church of Birmingham as they seek a new pastor.

## FEBRUARY

- Feb 1 First Congregational of Atlanta as they continue the new team ministry.
- Feb 8 The Allen Retreat Center and its planning.
- Feb 15 The continued witness of Pleasant Hill Comm. Church and the Uplands Retirement Ctr (TN).
- Feb 22 Dependent missions of Southeast churches: Biloxi Back Bay Mission as they celebrate 75 years; Elon Homes as their ministry expands.

## MARCH

- Mar 1 The Conference Staff and Ministers
- Mar 8 The strong witness of the Nashville churches: Howard Memorial, Brookmeade, First United.
- Mar 15 Antioch Congregational Christian in Andalusia, AL, as it seeks to expand its building and grow into the millennium.
- Mar 22 Easter celebrations in all our churches as we rejoice in the resurrected Christ — that our commitment to Christ may be deepened and our hearts opened to all who suffer unjustly.
- Mar 29 For our congregations in Roanoke: Antioch Congreg., Bethany Lime, New Hope, N. Main Congreg., Rock Springs Congreg.

May God bless us all in this new year, just two years from the new century!

— Dick Sales

## Fred Coulter Resigns from SEC

The Southeast Conference has received with regret the resignation of Fred Coulter. His work on the new *Covenant for Growth and Renewal* will continue to serve the Conference well in the months to come.

**Rev. John Mingus**, pastor of Pilgrim Congregational in Chattanooga has graciously agreed to serve as an interim Conference Associate for the next six months. A 1970 graduate of Bangor Theological Seminary who earned his DMin in 1986 from Hartford Seminary, John has served Pilgrim since 1995. He had previously served as Secretary for Church Development in the Division of Evangelism and Church Development of the UCBHM.

## The Way Home

Several years ago, I was invited to write a spiritual autobiography. I decided to call it *The Way Home*. A few days before the catalog announcing the book was to be printed, an author's worst fear came true. The title I had chosen was discovered on a book with a considerably different perspective (a work by a fundamentalist Christian woman arguing that the only hope for our society is putting women back in the home, where they belong). I hastily called together some colleagues at *Sojourners* magazine, where I was working at the time, and we scrambled for a new title. Their suggestions of *Home*, *Home on the Range* and *There's No Place Like Home* were quickly rejected. After several more unsuccessful tries, they urged me to give up on finding a title with the word *Home* in it. But I was insistent. We finally settled on *Turning Toward Home* (even though they said it sounds like something horses do on a racetrack).

My first spiritual home was the First Evangelical United Brethren Church (later United Methodist) on Chocolate Avenue in Hershey, Pennsylvania. It stopped feeling like home to me at the age of 13 when Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was assassinated. I was stunned as I watched images from the resulting riots in nearby Harrisburg come over the TV into my family's comfortable living room. The news that not everyone in America lived the way we did in Hershey was a revelation that turned my world upside down and set me on a journey to find a new "home."

My questions about injustice and suffering, about the division between people, took me into Harrisburg that summer, on to East Harlem during college, then to *Sojourners* Community in inner-city Washington, DC. I think it's no coincidence that I spent 15 years in an intentional Christian community called *Sojourners*. The image of being a sojourner, a person on a journey, on a search for home, is an appropriate metaphor for my life.

*Sojourners* was ecumenical to the core. At one point, we had 12 denominations represented among the membership. The first child born into the community was nine years old before we figured out what we believed about baptism! (We recognized that the spiritual ancestors of our Roman Catholic members had persecuted — and even killed — the spiritual ancestors of our Mennonite members over this very question.) We tried always to respect all traditions and work toward unity in the Spirit.

When I left *Sojourners* a few years ago, I began another leg of the journey in search of a home. Along the way I worshipped with a National Baptist congregation and led workshops for the Baptist Peace Fellowship; worked as the director of an Episcopal youth group; and published books with Presbyterian and United Methodist presses. But nothing felt entirely like home — nothing, that is, until I took a seminary course in United Church of Christ polity last spring.

I discovered in the United Church of Christ a denomination that is dedicated to following Jesus Christ, rooted in the Word of God, and committed to justice and ecumenism. Its embrace of unity, while celebrating diversity, resonates with the steps of my own journey. The more I learned about the UCC — and the more I met those of you who have been at home here for many years — the more I heard the invitation, "You have a home here, too."

I am deeply grateful to be able to serve you as the Conference Associate for Spiritual Development and Community Building. There are gifts that I am anxious to offer, but I am also well aware that I have much to learn from you. Thank you for your warm welcome. You are blessed companions on this journey. Please stay in touch.

The Letter to the Ephesians reminds us where we truly find our home. We are all "members of the household of God" (2:19). As we try to live as the family of God — with all the love, conflict, and hope that relationship entails — may we keep in mind the blessing of Ephesians 3: "I pray that, according to the riches of God's glory, God may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through the Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love."

— Joyce Hollyday